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ABSTRACT

This paper begins by telling the story of Edward, a preacher/teacher in Tanzania who, although poor and uneducated himself, managed to teach his parishioners how to read. The paper describes the experience of one man and his wife who spent 4 years at Katoke Teachers College in northwest Tanzania during the early 1970s, after which they returned to their home in Australia. The paper describes Katoke yesterday and today--the author returned to Katoke in 1998 for a visit. It notes that many things are now in disrepair, but the setting near Lake Victoria is still beautiful and the hospitality and vitality of the people are intact. It also points out that the poor economic conditions badly affect the provision of education in Katoke, from the primary school to the teachers college. The paper then describes the link that was formed between Katoke Teachers College and the School of Education at the University of New South Wales. It also discusses the establishment in Sydney of the Katoke Trust--a local aid body--which set up a scholarship fund for postgraduate study for promising students from Katoke; widows and orphans projects to send young children to school; and library books sent to Katoke. According to the paper, the whole thrust is to use available resources to help the people to help themselves. (NKA)

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By Alan J. Watson

Paper presented at the International Reading Association World Congress on Reading (19th, Edinburgh, Scotland, July 29-August 1, 2002)

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"HAKUNA MATATA": LAKESIDE LITERACY IN TANZANIA

An Unlikely Revolutionary

The 20th century witnessed many revolutions which had profound effects on human life - in transportation, industry, telecommunications and information technology. But the greatest and most influential of all has been the universal spread of literacy. No societal change has been as widespread in its effects or as life-changing in its benefits as literacy.

At the beginning of the twentieth century [according to UNESCO], 12% of the world's population was literate. At the end of the century, 77% was literate.

The very act of learning to read – by requiring consideration of events divorced from their occurrence – shapes and enhances the mind of the individual and the society. Literacy is the supreme amplifier of human abilities, opening windows for cultural, economic and spiritual development.

However, just as we take other 20th century revolutions for granted (who thinks twice about the switch from horse and buggy to jet travel) so we easily take literacy for granted. Huge numbers of people in third world countries like Tanzania have never had opportunity to learn to read. The average basic literacy rate among the least developed nations is 48%.

So how does literacy come to an illiterate people?

The most memorable person I met in Tanzania was an unlikely literacy teacher, Edwardi. I vividly recall meeting him soon after first arriving as a member of staff at Katoke Teachers College on the western shore of Lake Victoria in '68.

He walked along the dusty road towards me pushing his bike: medium height, tattered discoloured shirt, open face, bare feet hardened by a lifetime without shoes. He was pushing the worst apology for a "bisikeli" (Swahili for bicycle) I'd ever seen. It was held together with brown banana bark wrapped tightly around its tyres (to prevent stone splits going any further), around the frame and around the metal base of the seat which had long since lost its leather. It looked like it wouldn't even hold its owners' modest weight and gave new meaning to the word "pushbike".

Edward was introduced to me as the church evangelist and stuttered a Swahili greeting, "Jajaambo BBBw Waawatasoni." He gave me a big smile as if to say "hakuna matata" – no worries, no problems, "she'll be right mate".

He was handed an envelope, held it up very close to his eyes and struggled to read the address, hesitantly sounding out letter after letter.

"How could this man fulfil his preaching/teaching responsibilities?" I wondered, He can't even speak fluently, let alone read well.

Later I travelled with our local African minister, Geravasi Kasano, to a newly opened area, Chato, some 200 km south. There were no schools, just a dirt track, a small, white-walled government building and the people's modest mud-thatched houses set among the corn and cotton fields.

We visited a remote church - a thatched, mud walled building open on one side with soft grass on the dirt floor. Inside were 15 or 20 people reading the bible and praying to Jesus.

I asked them how they heard about Jesus. "Edwardi told us", they said. "And how did you learn to read?" "Edwardi taught us".

Their answers bowled me over. Edward seemed hardly able to read himself yet he was the one who taught these people to read the bible! I was humbled. With all my education and teaching experience I couldn't do for them what Edward was able to do.

As I thought about this I realized that all the essential elements of successful adult literacy teaching and learning were present.

1. A committed teacher who arouses interest and meets them where they are at. Edward was the ideal tutor. He knew how hard their life was because he shared it.

2. Reading material the learners find engaging and worthy. The rich literature of the bible in which they found echoes of their own deepest human struggles provided just that.

3. A social context of mutual support and interest. The community of faith, gathered in the shelter of that simple hut gave a strong impetus to learn and persist.

Jerome Bruner, the great American psychologist, says,

"Most of our approaches to the world are mediated through negotiation with others." (*Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*, 1986, p.68)

The influential Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky argues that learning presupposes "a specific social nature and a process by which children [or adults] grow into the intellectual life of those around them". (*Mind in Society*, 1978 p.68)

Edward, as I got to know him, was poor and uneducated, unsophisticated, a person of guileless naïveté - even simple minded, like Dostoyevski's Idiot - certainly not very likely to create vigorous intellectual life, let alone a great revolution. But he did just that among a group of people for whom reading was a new thing.

The revolution he helped to begin at Chato continues and there are now growing churches, schools and much greater levels of literacy. But with less than 50% of Tanzanian children in such areas going to primary school, there are many whom the literacy revolution has bypassed.

We who are privileged to live in developed countries, with our abundant wealth and life opportunities, are well able to help them to sustain such a life-influencing revolution. We felt we should.

But how did I get involved in this?

Katoke Yesterday and Now: Wealth, Education and Development

My wife and I worked for four years at Katoke Teachers College in north west Tanzania, returning to Australia in the early 70ies. I kept in touch with a few people there by occasional letters over many years then had an opportunity to go back in 1998 - which was an eye opener. It enabled me to bring a unique perspective to look at what had happened in this remote but fascinating part of Africa.

What was it like?

• Located beside Lake Victoria, Katoke is very beautiful, well watered and green, with an ideal temperature range of 17 - 29 c. It is a rural area, heavily populated with closely settled, farming villages.

• The College, which accommodates 400 residential students, is the only teacher education institution in the Kagera region of 2m. people. A primary school with 600 pupils is attached. Katoke was begun by Australian missionaries as a primary school in 1929 and as a teachers college in 1937. It is now under government control. It is situated on a large grass and tree covered plateau 51 kms from the regional capital, Bukoba. It is operating with an academic and administrative staff of 25 – but with some difficulties.

• Swahili, the national language, is much spoken. Travelling in a crowded mini bus for a couple of hours to get the last 51 kms to the Campus was a great incentive for me to try the language. And my Swahili came back.

• What impressed me most was the wealth of friendship - the hospitality and the vitality of the people. There is a spiritual life, a faith, a sense of God - and a gratitude and humility that goes with it. This enriched us more than we ever anticipated. Hakuna matata doesn't just mean, "no problems". Tata is a tangle, an intrigue, so hakuna matata means no intrigue, no deceit, no pretense. I don't want to idealise and paint them in stronger colours than is true. There are plenty who do not fit this description. But that's what we have found among most of those with whom we've been privileged to work. Tanzania is one of the poorest countries in the world, but many of the people we meet possessed a spiritual wealth we in Australia seem to be losing.

I want to take you into the warmth of one of the family homes we visited for an evening meal so that you can share something of the glow we carried away with us.
It is the home of Wilson Katunzi - Mayor of the local government, chair of the school board, member of the College Council, lay canon in the church, overseer of a local widows and orphans support program – a man of great energy and vision for the district.
After the meal was finished, we sat around laughing and chatting.

But as we talked and I was able to compare yesterday and now, I started to realise the district is fighting gamely against great odds to

- educate and open life opportunities for its children
- provide health services and prevent aids and malaria
- communicate and travel - even just around the area

Tanzania has suffered a series of economic setbacks since the early eighties. In regard to poverty, on the UN human development index it has the distinction of being the second poorest nation in the world (Sierra Leone is poorer). 51% of Tanzania's people live on less than US$1 a day. When we visited Katoke in '98 it didn't take long to notice the effects, for example, In the 70s, A$1 bought Tsh10/- . Now it buys Tsh500/- . This is a devaluation of over 50 times! To the American dollar, of course, it has been much worse.

Roads are worse than they were. We used to drive a VW beetle.
A 4WD is now needed. You must change gears just to get out of some of the potholes!

The College is a good case study. It has some fine buildings but maintenance had not been done for 30 years and they were decaying seriously. And there is a shortage of even the most basic educational items such as paper or text books or teaching equipment. And the library is heartbreaking. Virtually no books have been added for the past 30 years.

Communication/transport is a major problem.

The College has no reliable vehicle - before we had two.
No staff member now has his/her own car. Previously several did.
There is no telephone link. There is no mail delivery.
The PO and phone is 18km. down the road.

The water supply to homes and campus is intermittent.
The campus and village dispensary project was stalled through lack of funds
As we sat around that Katunzi meal table in the glow of the kerosene lamp and discussed the needs of the area with some of its leaders, they didn't ask for help for any of these things. They said to us,

" We'd like help to get a better price for our coffee".

Here is a strong sense of self-help. They don't complain. They show no self-pity. They have an impressive dignity in the face of what to us would be overwhelming difficulties. Here you can be honest and hard working all your life but still be unable to afford to send your children to high school or buy them medicines when they are ill.

And the economic conditions badly affect the provision of education:

- Schools and the College have had to charge fees - in this rural area only 46% of local children attend primary school - across the country its 68%
- There's a general shortage of basic supplies - chalk, books, paper
- Staff are poorly paid - Tsh10000/- =A$20 (c. $US10 Pounds 6.80) a week - and they generally feel discouraged.
- Standards - in schools and College - have dropped.
  The UN Development Program report on Tanzania (2000) says education in Tanzania and especially primary schooling, is in "an egregious state", - i.e., extra-ordinarily bad.

Katoke Primary School is the best in the area but itself needs support.

Yet we know that education is essential for development:

Education is the single most vital element
in combating poverty,
in empowering women,

in advancing human rights and democracy,
in protecting the environment and
in promoting health and healthy lifestyles.

So there is a crisis of educational provision in a country where 45% of the population are under 15 years of age.

What can we do?

A Link. We wondered whether we could help and we asked our hosts.
The College Principal invited us to do a professional program for the staff so I put it to our school of education at University of NSW. If staff were prepared to give their time the school had some enterprise funds to pay for our travel. So in 1998 we formed a link between our two institutions and began with a professional visit to the College.

Professional Program. With two colleagues we did observations in schools, prepared our materials accordingly and conducted a week of seminars and workshops. The professionally starved Katoke staff – of the College and the attached primary school – were glowing in their evaluation. We concluded,
"The enthusiasm of teachers … gives good reason to believe that work with an expanded group of schools would be very beneficial for teacher morale and classroom performance" (Watson & Nettle, 1999).

This was the first of five annual seminars each of about one week. During this time we developed a program which included in-service education for some of the local schools as well.

This year we put the project to AusAID and the Archbishop of Sydney's Overseas Relief and Aid Fund as an in-service program for school improvement and were delighted to be told a few weeks ago that they will sponsor our project for three years. We do this as a carefully controlled pilot for possible wider application.

The program consists of sessions to train the college staff in the presentation and supervision of workshops for the 180 teachers from 15 schools in a radius of 12 km of the college for a week of intensive learning on campus. The program is based on maximising student time-on-task and implementing mastery learning (including sessions on the active child, the skills of teaching and the essence of planning and evaluation). It also features peer supervision, leadership development and the harnessing of community support.

Results. Exam results of the Katoke Primary School students in recent years have been very encouraging. There is a Standard Seven National Examination to mark the end of primary school and to screen students for the 5% of students who can get places in secondary schools. Students are tested on three curriculum areas: Language (Swahili and English), Mathematics, and Social Science/General Knowledge. Results are shown in Table 1.

Since 1998 when the Sydney team began conducting the professional program with the participation of these teachers there has been a very strong performance of Katoke students in the exam and increasing numbers have gained admission to secondary school. Yet there was

also a marked jump in attainment from 1996 to 1997 before the seminars began so there are other factors which have made a difference. These were investigated by school observation and interview with the Head Teacher and staff. The factors which seem to have made a difference include,

- the cohesion of the staff,
- their commitment to give extra tuition for students soon to sit the exam and
- the effective leadership of the Head Teacher.

Yet it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the seminars have made a significant contribution to the sustained good results of the School.

Table 1. Katoke Primary School: Place in the district on the Standard Seven National Examinations 1992 - 2001

Year	Place in the district N=139	Place in the nation N=2300
1992	61	-
1993	49	-
1994	52	-
1995	53	-
1996	47	5172
1997	15	2939
1998	5	1578
1999	2	720
2000	6	748
2001	5	462

Note. Details of place in the nation were not available until 1996.

Other Needs

In our visits we have become conscious of serious needs that are much wider than education, but which closely impinge on the capacity of children to benefit from education, e.g., health problems or dire poverty of orphans who cannot pay even the modest school fees charged.

In Sydney we have established the Katoke Trust - a local aid body - which has several lines of approach.

• A Scholarship Fund for postgraduate study for promising staff and teachers has been set up. The first scholarship holder, Constantine Lugayila from Katoke, has completed an MEd at Dar Es Salaam University. Four other scholarship holders have begun further studies.

• Widows and orphans projects – We fund 300 orphans to attend school. We assist widows to grow pineapples and to establish a sewing cooperative under local leadership.

• Library books. We've been able to ship 20 boxes of second hand books to expand the library at Katoke.

We are knocking on doors. We are seeking aid funds from donors that our Tanzanian friends don't know about or couldn't contact if they did. We've put up proposals for several other projects - many have failed, some have been successful.

• A Dispensary – the Katoke medical center with a six bed maternity ward has been funded by the Anglican Abp of Sydney's Overseas Relief and Aid Fund to finish the building and get its health and preventative medical program going.

• Electricity for the dispensary - granted by AusAID

• Vanilla Project - 30 demonstration/propagation plots. Knocked back by Aus AID in an African Food Security window but being considered again now.

(On the matter or getting a better price for coffee –the one cash crop - we tried but have failed dismally. Five years ago the farmer got about A%1 (50cUS) a kilo. Now she/he's getting A10c (US5c). Coffee is just not worth growing.)

• Telephone microwave link is possible. We have quotes and will be seeking support.

Good and Bad Aid

Not all aid is good aid. Much aid does not produce sustainable benefits. Not all aid goes where it was intended.

The whole thrust is to use our resources to help the people to help themselves. Our work is with existing community groups and leaders whom we know and who are answerable. Our resources are small but a little in our terms can do much in Tanzania.

Yet the task is huge so it is encouraging to see positive results of the work of others. For example, this year when we went to Tanzania we found that primary school fees have been abolished. The success of the Jubilee 2000 Drop the Debt campaign, with its chief advocate Bono from U2, has meant there is more to spend on education and health and so the government has abolished primary school fees.

We are encouraging our friends and our federal government to be more open handed with their support for the third world.

Unfortunately, in Australia a mood of self-absorption has slowly grown since the end of the cold war. The vast problems of the third world we have increasingly thought as hopeless and that nothing can be done and so have averted our gaze. Perhaps this is generally true throughout the west but the Australian aid budget as a proportion of GDP has now reached its lowest point - 0.25% - when UN asks that we give 0.7%. But if there is one positive thing we can learn from the events of September 11 it is that we can't make the world a safe place by military action alone. President George Bush recently announced a $5b. increase in aid, "This growing divide between wealth and poverty, between opportunity and misery, is both a challenge to our compassion and a source of instability. We must confront it. He added. We must include every African … in an expanding circle of development."

The idea that we can continue to live in comfort while much of the world struggles to survive is untenable.

Central to any progress is education. Economic growth depends most importantly on maximizing human potential. Without a strong educational thrust, especially in literacy, it is difficult to see any progress.

Since literacy is such a crucial element in any development, the IRA has a unique contribution. In receiving this Citation of Merit I want to say that there is much to be done to ensure literacy is strong in our own countries but I would submit that there is an even greater challenge in the

third world. We, IRA members, are the teachers and guardians of the greatest revolution of the past 100 years. And there is more we can do and more we should do, especially in Africa.

At the same time we can learn much from our African brothers and sisters - about that non-material wealth - that spiritual capital we seem to have forgotten about.
Thanks for according me the honour of the International Citation of Merit. I receive it on behalf of all who support the Katoke Trust.

"Hakuna matata"

This is the text of an address given to the International Reading Association World Congress in Edinburgh on 29 July, 2002 Associate Professor Alan Watson,
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